

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEHRAN 05444 210704Z
ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 DHA-02 PM-03 IO-06 DODE-00
CIAE-00 INR-05 L-01 H-01 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PA-01
PRS-01 /047 W
-----022719 210730Z /13

R 210540Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3159
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 5444

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, SHUM, IR
SUBJ: MILITARY COURT REFORM LEGISLATION

REF: TEHRAN 5337

1. REFTTEL REPORTED THAT GOVERNMENT OF IRAN HAS INTRODUCED
LEGISLATION IN PARLIAMENT DESIGNED TO MODIFY AND REFORM SIGNI-
FICANTLY THE MILITARY AND PENAL CODES IN THE INSTANCE OF
CIVILIANS CHARGED BEFORE A MILITARY COURT. THESE AMENDMENTS,
IN ENACTED, WILL GO A LONG WAY TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF MANY
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES BOTH WITHIN IRAN AND IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

2. ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED THAT THE GOI, CONCERNED ABOUT
ITS IMAGE PROBLEM IN THE U.S. AND U.K., WOULD HAVE MADE SOME-
THING OF A PUBLICITY SPLASH ON THIS DEVELOPMENT, ESPECIALLY
DIRECTED TO FOREIGN WIRE SERVICES. INSTEAD, THE GOI INFORMATION
SOURCES GAVE A PERFUNCTORY BRIEFING ONLY TO THE LOCAL PRESS
SOURCES, WHICH PLAYED THE STORY IN MODEST TERMS IN THE
LOCAL PRESS. A PERFUNCTORY TWO OR THREE PARAGRAPH FILE
ITEM WAS ALL THAT IT MERITED ON THE WIRE SERVICES. IT IS
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DOUBTFUL THAT IT ATTRACTED MUCH ATTENTION IN THE US OR
UK.

3. IN ORDER TO MEASURE GOI SENSITIVITY TO THEIR INDADEQUATE
PERFORMANCE, I ASKED MY INFORMATION OFFICER TO MAKE INNOCENT
INQUIRY OF THE VICE MINISTER OF INFORMATION ABOUT HIS PLANS
FOR HANDLING THE SUBJECT. IT EMERGED FROM THIS CONVERSATION

THAT THE VICE MINISTER WAS TOTALLY UNAWARE THAT A DRAFT BILL HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE MAJLES. HE, NATURALLY, HAD NO PLANS FOR PUBLICITY, AND IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER HE WILL HAVE ANY NOW THAT HE IS AWARE OF THE BILL.

4. TWO DAYS AFTER THE BILL WAS SUBMITTED, I HAD A VISIT FROM RETIRED AMBASSADOR CHARLES YOST, WHO HAD BEEN IN IRAN FOR AN ASPEN CONFERENCE. HE BEMOANED THE IMAGE WHICH IRAN HAD ABROAD AND ITS DELETERIOUS EFFECTS UPON CONSTRUCTIVE PARTICIPATION IN ASPEN PROJECTS FROM SOME SECTORS OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY. I MENTIONED THE BILL TO HIM AND FOUND THAT HE HAD NEVER HEARD OF IT. HE UNDERTOOK TO INFORM HIMSELF. IT IS POSSIBLE HE MAY WRITE SOMETHING ABOUT IT IN HIS OCCASIONAL PRESS COLUMNS.

5. THIS EPISODE INDICATES TO ME THAT IRAN WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE A WORSE PUBLIC IMAGE THAN IT DESERVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS UNTIL IT LEARNS TO DO BETTER IN ADVERTISING THE STEPS WHICH IT IS TAKING IN THIS FIELD. THE USG AND OTHERS CANNOT RPT NOT DO THE JOB FOR THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE CAN AND PROBABLY SHOULD PROD THEM TO DO A BETTER JOB.

6. AMBASSADOR ZAHEDI SEEMS TO HAVE A FLAIR FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS. THE NEW YORK TIMES OP-ED PAGE OWES AMBASSADOR HOVEYDA SOME RETRIBUTION FOR THE PHOTO CARICATURIZATION WHICH ADORNED HIS LETTER ON HUMAN RIGHTS. PERHAPS INNOCENT QUERIES TO BOTH THESE MEN ON THEIR ACTIONS RESPECTING THIS CONFIDENTIAL

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BILL WILL STIMULATE THEM TO CONSIDER SOME EFFECTIVE ACTIONS ON THEIR OWN BEHALF.

7. I WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT VIEWS.
SULLIVAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PENAL REFORM, COURTS MARTIAL
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 21-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TEHRAN05444
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770220-1028
Format: TEL
From: TEHRAN
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770633/aaaabdhc.tel
Line Count: 99
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 1a9ce378-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 77 TEHRAN 5337
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 17-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2077471
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MILITARY COURT REFORM LEGISLATION
TAGS: PGOV, SHUM, IR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/1a9ce378-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009